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TAGS: [PREL](#), [EAID](#), [BM](#), [TH](#), [ASSK](#)

SUBJECT: ASSK TALKS BIG PICTURE WITH NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR
DEMOCRACY'S AMBRAMOWITZ

Classified By: COM CARMEN M. MARTINEZ FOR REASON 1.5(D).

1. (C) Summary: Following meetings with several SPDC officials, former Ambassador Morton Abramowitz met at the EMR with NLD Secretary Aung San Suu Kyi on December 5th. The COM and the PAO were also present. In a discussion that lasted nearly two hours, Abramowitz checked his impressions and the assertions of the SPDC officials with ASSK. He asked for ASSK's reading of the gravity of the situation facing the country and the prospects for change, and her views on how best to provide humanitarian assistance. End Summary.

2. (U) The former ambassador, now a Director of the National Endowment for Democracy, had met earlier with the Home, Labor, and Education Ministers, as well as with Kyaw Thein and Hla Min. A meeting with S1 General Khin Nyunt was cancelled at the last minute. Abramowitz reported that a theme he had not heard in his last visit in 1997, the "integration of the ethnic nationalities," permeated all his discussions with SPDC officials. Most officials averred that there was no economic crisis, and the SPDC was moving at its own pace toward transition, because the integration of the nationalities was not secure enough to move precipitously to a new arrangement.

3. (C) ASSK replied that in her recent visit to Shan State she found "strong solidarity between the ethnicities and us" and greater support than the NLD enjoyed twelve years ago. She said she was encouraged that the Shans had evidently laid aside ethnic considerations and had recognized that the most important need was for political change. Even in the go-go border town of Tachileik, she found "amazing support," signifying that the merchants dependent on the border trade had realized that there could be no economic development without political change. She indicated that she would complete a round of visits to each of the States during this dry season.

4. (C) Abramowitz asked whether a "humanitarian crisis" exists and, if so, should more assistance be given, even if through the Burmese Government? ASSK agreed there were very serious problems, such as HIV/AIDS, the quality of education, and the health care system. While she said she didn't believe the system was on the verge of collapse, something very small could spark "unforeseen circumstances." She said that assistance programs should be expanded, but not through the SPDC. Although she allowed there have to be dealings with the government, there should be "no compromise" on the basic requirements for accountability, transparency, independent monitoring, and providing no benefit to the SPDC. She offered the Network Project (a UNICEF early childhood development program) as an example of a program that worked without helping the SPDC and promoted pluralism at the same time. She expressed dismay that USG assistance for this project may not be continued.

5. (C) She complained that the SPDC was able to "pressurize" the UN agencies against cooperating with her, and asked, if UN agencies cave in to pressure on this front "how can we trust them" on other matters. She pointed out it must be questioned whether humanitarian assistance would help the Burmese people provide for themselves in the future. "Are they going to survive just to die another day? Or are they going to survive to change the system?"

6. (C) Abramowitz said he was leaving Burma with the impression that the current regime would make very little effort to deal with her or to move toward civilian government, and asked whether the only way to effect change under these circumstances would be to encourage a split in the military. ASSK agreed he was "basically right" and that it was probably Sr. General Than Shwe who opposed change. She opined that he could not be as firmly in control as is supposed because he is "too lazy to do his homework" and lets people around him do all the work. She said the international community must keep up the pressure, continue to point out that change is inevitable and at the same time, make clear to those in the military that favor political change that reasonable elements are appreciated, and give them more confidence.

7. (C) As the discussion wound down, ASSK said it was

necessary to continue to "work on practical terms" and "build up the strength of the people -- but that's our (e.g. the party's) job and . . . we're not doing badly." She said although she cannot say the NLD as an organization is getting stronger -- citing the stumbling blocks to opening branch offices including harassment by local PDC's and USDA's -- support for the party is getting much stronger.
Martinez